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FM AMEMBASSY KABUL
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INFO RUCNAFG/AFGHANISTAN COLLECTIVE
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RUMICEA/USCENTCOM INTEL CEN MACDILL AFB FL
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 KABUL 002436

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DEPT FOR SCA/FO, S/CT, SA/A
NSC FOR AHARRIMAN, KAMEND
CENTCOM FOR POLAD, CG CFC-A, CG CJTF-76
TREASURY FOR LMCDONALD, WBALDRIDGE, APARAMESWARAN, ABAUKOL
STATE PLEASE PASS USAID FOR AID/ANE, AID/DCHA/DG
REL NATO/ISAF, AUS, NZ

E.O. 12958: DECL: 09/04/2015

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PINR](#) [PTER](#) [AF](#)

SUBJECT: SITREP 5/29 1600: MILITARY CONVOY ACCIDENT LEADS
TO RIOTS IN KABUL

Classified By: AMBASSADOR RONALD NEUMANN FOR REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D)

[¶1](#). (C) SUMMARY. A vehicle accident on the outskirts of Kabul involving a US military supply convoy resulted in at least one Afghan casualty and led to rioting around Kabul on May [¶29](#). The situation in Kabul as of 1600 local time was calm except for some small protests in the northwestern suburbs of Kabul. The number of casualties and protesters involved remains unconfirmed. As of 1600, all Embassy personnel are accounted for. President Karzai has postponed a trip to Qatar; in a meeting with Ambassador this afternoon, he was focused on whether other cities will remain quiet and whether there was any preplanning behind this incident. END SUMMARY.

Details of Accident Still Unclear

[¶2](#). (C) CFC-A reports that around 0810 local time a vehicle in a supply convoy moving from Bagram Air Base to Kabul apparently experienced a mechanical (brake) malfunction and hit several smaller local vehicles in the Saray-e Shomali area in the northern suburbs of Kabul, killing at least one Afghan. The military vehicle appears to have been a large truck that was unable to stop as it was coming down a slope. The crowd that gathered quickly became hostile, and CFC-A drivers left the scene. An undetermined number of additional Afghans may have been killed or injured during the accident and during post-accident clashes between Afghan National Police (ANP) and protesters. CFC-A is conducting a thorough investigation into the accident.

[¶3](#). (C) Afghan news and local politicians report that the convoy had been driving recklessly, edging several vehicles off the road before causing the accident. We have no confirmation that these reports are true. Unconfirmed reports indicate that a roadblock may have been set up at Saray-e Shomali in anticipation of the convoy coming through. Conspiracy theories abound and all should be treated with skepticism for the time being. A well-positioned video camera was located at the traffic circle where the initial

protests took place, which took video that was aired shortly after the event, including on al-Jazeera. Press coverage of the accident was biased: one CFC-A humvee was shown on national TV firing shots, followed by images of the Afghan(s) killed or injured, without showing that the shots were actually fired into the air.

Rioting in Kabul Quieting

14. (SBU) The reaction to the accident began with rock-throwing in Saray-e Shomali, but became inflamed over the course of the day. As of 1600 local time, the following events were reported in the local press and Embassy contacts:

- At 1300, violent demonstrators approached the Embassy from the west. When they reached within 500 meters of the Embassy, Afghan National Police (ANP) fired warning shots and dispersed the crowd. Two other groups of protesters approaching the Embassy from the SW and North were also dispersed by the ANP.
- The airport is secure, and after being temporarily blocked by protesters, accessible.
- CARE International's offices (in Shahr-e Naw near downtown) were burned and reportedly completely destroyed. This property is owned by the US government and leased to CARE International. Their staff are all accounted for and safe.
- The residence of USAID contractor IRD was burned down. In total 14 AID contractors were left homeless; all have found places to stay, including two now residing at the Embassy.
- The Serena Hotel (downtown) was damaged by looters who broke windows and destroyed facilities on the most accessible

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side of the building.

- The Ariana TV station (in West Kabul close to Parliament) was partially burned.
- Various guard booths and police booths around Wazir Akbar Khan (the district near the US Embassy and the location of most foreign missions) were set on fire.
- The 11th District Police Station (in NW Kabul), as well as several other police guard booths, were looted and burned. Also in the 11th District, protesters attacked local businesses.
- There are numerous unconfirmed reports of other damage across the city. A report that the German Embassy was attacked is false (German DCM-Amb. Neumann telcon).

15. (SBU) Contacts at MOI state that ANP and Afghan National Army (ANA) forces have been stationed around Kabul and the situation has quieted in 80-85 percent of the city. As of 1600, there was only violence reported in Khair Khana district and other districts in northwest Kabul. MOI sources stated that the rioters appeared to be unarmed, but that they were throwing stones and attempting to burn down buildings.

16. (SBU) There are no definite reports of the number of groups protesting, or the numbers of protesters involved. There are no confirmed reports of ANP or others firing into any crowd of protesters. Most local businesses closed early in the rioting, and some reports indicated that shopkeepers fired in the air to protect their businesses. Initial reports from MOI are that 15 protesters have been arrested, and more arrests will take place this evening. MOI also reports local hospitals are busy treating injured from today's protests, but no clear numbers are available.

GOA Response

17. (SBU) When the protesters approached Parliament, Lower House Speaker Yunus Qanooni and several other MPs (including Saleh Regestani from Panjshir) went out to speak to the protesters. After speaking to Ambassador Neumann, Qanooni said that the Coalition forces would compensate victims of

the accident - and if they didn't, Qanooni himself would pay compensation. In his conversation with the leaders of the demonstrators, which received coverage on Ariana TV, he said that he had spoken to the US Ambassador, and that the Ambassador had said that the Ambassador had expressed his regret over the incident. According to press reports, the protesters began dispersing from around Parliament after Qanooni's comments. Qanooni, other MPs, and the Attorney General also issued public statements calling for calm.

US Response

¶8. (SBU) CFC-A issued two statements commenting on the accident, the first one stating that the incident was an accident. The second statement, issued at 1400, contained more detail about the accident, noted that Coalition troops at the scene had rendered immediate medical assistance to the injured, and expressed regret about the incident. It also noted that compensation would be given to those who are entitled to it.

¶9. (SBU) The US Embassy was in lockdown (with American and local employees moved to secure locations) from around 1300 to 1600. All Embassy employees are accounted for. Post plans to follow a reduced staffing plan for Tuesday, May 30.

Karzai

¶10. (C) Ambassador saw President Karzai around 15:30. Karzai feels police performed poorly but Post thinks the

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picture is more mixed. Karzai deferred a planned trip to Qatar today and will remain in Kabul tomorrow. His relations with Qanooni remain strained. Karzai is mainly focused on whether other cities will remain quiet and whether there was any preplanning for the event.

Comment

¶10. (C) It will take additional time to determine whether these protests were the result of anything more than spontaneous outrage over a traffic accident. The presence of a video camera at the scene of the initial protests and the possible motivation behind it and the negative media coverage, are also the cause for some suspicion. Unconfirmed reports also indicate that some protesters were carrying white flags - a symbol of support for the Taliban. In his meeting with Ambassador, President Karzai indicated he may go on national television tonight; meanwhile, he issued a statement appealing for calm, expressing regret, and calling on coalition forces to conduct an investigation.

NEUMANN